

Commission on Children's Justice to hold public hearing April 27

April 21, 2011

The Mississippi Commission on Children's Justice will hold a public hearing in Room 216 at the State Capitol at 1 p.m. April 27.

The Supreme Court reestablished the Mississippi Commission on Children's Justice in 2010 as an advisory group to examine the juvenile justice system and recommend improvements. The Commission is expected to address the structure and operation of the Youth Court system and interactions of the juvenile justice, child welfare and education systems. The Commission will work to improve communications and coordination between all entities which deal with the best interests of children.

The Mississippi Commission hopes to gain insight from its Texas counterparts at the first hearing. Texas Children's Commission Executive Director Tina Amberboy and retired Judge John Specia, Jurist in Residence for the Texas Children's Commission, are scheduled to speak starting at 1:30 p.m. They are expected to talk about the mission and structure of their commission and how it works. The Texas officials will also discuss the structure and allocation of Texas youth court associate judges and Texas' multi-disciplinary judicial training, which is provided statewide to those involved in child protection judicial proceedings.

A panel discussion is scheduled for 2:45 to 3:30 p.m. Panelists include Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome, Forrest County Court Judge Michael McPhail, and recently retired Harrison County Court Judge Michael Ward. All three have extensive experience as Youth Court judges. They are expected to discuss the previous work of the Mississippi Children's Justice Commission and recommend areas of study for the recently reestablished commission.

The Mississippi Supreme Court created the Commission on Children's Justice in April 2006. The original Commission laid the groundwork for the Supreme Court's adoption of Uniform Rules of Youth Court Practice. The Supreme Court reestablished the Commission in June 2010, directing that it develop a statewide comprehensive approach to improving the child welfare system; coordinate the three branches of government in assessing the impact of government actions on children who are abused or neglected; and recommend changes to improve children's safety, strengthen and support families and promote public trust and confidence in the child welfare system.

Judge Broome and Supreme Court Justice Randy G. Pierce of Leakesville are co-chairs. Judge Broome leads a subcommittee which focuses on the Youth Court system. Court of Appeals Judge Virginia Carlton of Columbia leads a subcommittee which deals with education issues.

The hearing is the first of three public hearings to be scheduled by the Commission. A second hearing is scheduled for Sept. 23 on the campus of the University of Mississippi in Oxford. The third hearing is expected to be held in Hattiesburg, but the date and location have not been finalized.

The public is invited to each hearing. Due to the limitation of time at this hearing and the length of the expected testimony, members of the public may submit written comments for the Commission's consideration after the hearing.

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